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John Weaver—THAT'S ALL

SOMEWHAT ACCENTUATED, BUT—

By G. V. Thomas.

...s ago it was the fashion in ...a to ask "Who's John ... Two years ago, it was the ...wonder what characteristics ...er had brought to the ...hair.

...John Weaver, late in May, ...e plan of the Republican or... to make a new lease for a ...eventy-five years with the ...rporation now running the ...under the terms of the lease ...97, did Philadelphians gen...out that John Weaver is ...er—that's all, and that one ...ted characteristics is brist...rity.

...any man who knows him ...that John Weaver possesses ... It, too, has ever been one ...inguishing traits, and the ...which he exercised it in a ...a the Fairmount Park Com...ginning shortly after his as...e Mayoralty, is illuminating.

Typical Weaver Fight.

...mission, from time to time, ...ed plots of land outside the ...of Fairmount park, but fac...making these plots exceed...ble as sites for dwelling ...it has been the policy of ...ssion to trade these plots ...in sections where land is ...uable, several acres of land ...ntly been given in exchange ...three building lots along the ...

...mission was holding just ...in the neighborhood of ...and Twenty-third streets, in ...y-eighth ward, when it was ...erect a new school building ..., and the Mayor, thinking ...e city money for the site, ...ommission, of which he is an ...ember, to transfer to the ...Education as much of the ...eet plot as would be neces...ovide a site for the school ...the commission laughed at ... "That would hurt our ...r trading the entire plot at ... day," said the members, ...y, the Board of Education has not made a formal request that we do this thing you propose."

The Mayor hunted up the chairman of the property committee of the Board of Education, and when the Park Commission held its next regular meeting before them came a request from the property committee for the transfer of the plot, but still the commission refused to act.

So matters dragged along until there came a meeting, at which the Mayor was not present. Seizing on this advantage, the members present lost no time in deciding against the Mayor's plan, and further agreed, since the Mayor had been insistent, to advertise the whole plot for sale, and use the money thus secured for permanent improvement. In this fashion they fondly hoped they would put to an end all efforts of the Mayor to get the school site.

When the Mayor heard of the commission's move all he said was: "I propose to have that plot for school purposes." Up to this time most of the ex-officio members, the heads of various city departments, appointees of the Mayor, had been opposing him. Shortly before the next stated meeting of the commission was to be held these men were called into the Mayor's office, and undoubtedly were reminded by whose grace they drew fat salaries from the city treasury. At any rate, at the meeting, when the Mayor's proposition was called up for reconsideration, the ex-officio members changed front completely, and, with several of the other members who had also been won over to the Mayor's way of thinking by his threat to block all permanent park improvements, it was finally determined to set aside a site for school purposes and offer for sale the remainder of the plot.

It had taken the Mayor almost a year to gain his object; and the remnant of the plot is still awaiting a purchaser.

Making Friends His Enemies.

It is safe to say that no Mayor of Philadelphia has turned more of his old friends into inveterate enemies than has John Weaver; and many of these alienations occurred months before the gas lease fight came to a head or was in the air even.

For example, when he was simply a commercial lawyer, John Weaver had a client who wanted to sell to the city for park purposes a plot of ground on the northern boundary of the city, near Logan station. On account of the extreme length of the plot and its scant depth it was unsuitable for building lots, but quite satisfactory from the park viewpoint.

Weaver entered into negotiations with the proper authorities, but there was some haggling over the price, which, he held, was not remunerative enough, and finally the deal was declared off.

Not long after Weaver became Mayor Councils passed an ordinance setting aside a certain sum of money for the purchase of this plot which John Weaver, lawyer, had tried to sell to the city. In due course of time the ordinance was sent to him for action, and those who knew of the previous relations between the owner of the lot and the Mayor winked knowingly and declared that the Mayor's action would certainly be highly favorable to his old client's interests. They were greatly surprised, therefore, when the ordinance was returned to Councils with the Mayor's veto and the comment: "Price too high." As for the plot's owner, he has been a bitter enemy of the Mayor ever since.

On the other hand, the Mayor has not been afraid to stand by his friends when he has thought them to be in the right.

Long before the Mayor, in order to defeat the gas lease, was obliged to oust from office Director of Public Works Costello and Director of Public Safety Smyth, numerous organizations had made repeated and vehement demands that he remove Smyth, the charges being that he was using the police and firemen for political purposes and letting the city become a sink of iniquity. To all these demands and recriminations the Mayor turned a deaf ear and sturdily defended the accused director, who had been one of his assistant District Attorneys, both in private and public.

On one occasion, when the Mayor and Smyth were guests at a Hibernian society dinner, the Mayor was asked to present his director with a police baton made of blackthorn.

As he arose to make the presentation, he caught sight of one of his and the director's bitterest critics—Judge James Jay Gordon—and looking Gordon squarely in the eyes as he held out the baton to Smyth, the Mayor said:

"Take it, Mr. Smyth, and if necessary, don't hesitate to use it on the heads of your enemies."

Of course, it was said in a bantering sort of way, but all present understood the motive that had actuated the Mayor to speak in such a manner—and doubtless no one read the hidden meaning more clearly than Judge Gordon, who, by one of those queer whirligigs of time, has been the Mayor's chief counsel in his fight against the gas lease and the so-called Republican ring.

Extremely Certain of Himself.

Once the Mayor gets the idea that he is right in any matter, it is extremely difficult to get him to see otherwise. This cocksure trait has led to more than one amusing incident.

When the Liberty Bell was taken to St. Louis last summer, the Mayor and his family went along as escort, and, of course, Councils were represented by a large and enthusiastic delegation. Before the special train started on its journey toward the fair, the Councilmen put aboard an ample supply of fireworks in order that time might not hang heavily on their hands when all the other allurements possible on a junketing trip had lost their charms.

All the way to Indianapolis fireworks were shot off in abundance. But by the time the train reached the Indiana capital just exploding fireworks had become tame amusement, so some one suggested that a lot of cannon crackers be set off under the Mayor's private car. An amendment was offered and carried, that there be some fun at the time with the only quiet Councilman on the trip—George Edwards, from up Germantown way, whose solo speeches in Councils meetings have earned him the sobriquet of "Move-We-Adjourn" Edwards.

Now, Edwards is a portly man with luxuriant mutton-chop whiskers, and Councilman Thomas Morton, who made his reputation some weeks ago by declaring that he would be present in Councils and vote for the gas lease, even if his legs were cut off in the meantime, is equally portly, but without facial ornaments of any kind. However, a false beard made him take on all the outward likeness of his sedate colleague, and thus transformed the Councilmen, minus Edwards, who was peacefully sleeping in his berth, moved in a body on the Mayor's car.

The car was darkened—the Mayor slept. Under the car the Councilmen placed a bunch of cannon crackers—and the Mayor was awake. Then the city fathers began calling out, between explosions:

"Here, Edwards, set this off under the car!"

"Look out for the Mayor, George!"

"Good for you, Edwards! Bet that jarred his Honor some!"

And there were kindred remarks for the better part of the fifteen minutes during which the Councilmen amused themselves by disturbing the Mayor's slumbers.

The next morning the Mayor sent for Mr. Edwards, and as he left his colleagues his face was beaming—and so were theirs.

But when he got within handshaking reach of the Mayor, he was dumbfounded to hear the latter say:

"Mr. Edwards, until your disgraceful performance of last night I had always regarded you as gentleman."

"Why—why—what——" stammered Edwards.

"Don't make matters worse by denying that you set off the fireworks under my own eyes."

"But, Mr. Mayor——"

But it was no use—the Mayor would not listen to a word of explanation. Edwards returned, crestfallen, to his colleagues, and they, seeing that the joke had gone far enough, went to the Mayor and tried to convince him that he was wrong in blaming Edwards for his broken slumbers. But they made no better headway than Edwards himself. "You would not have me disbelieve my own eyes, would you?" was all the satisfaction that they could get from the Mayor.

Edwards grieved so over the Mayor's attitude that the trip lost all its charm for him. By the time the party reached Philadelphia, he was almost ill with worry, and if some of the junketers had not finally succeeded in convincing the Mayor, some two weeks after the return, that his eyes had belied him after all, there is no telling to what extremity Edwards might have been brought.

Of course, the Mayor made amends to Edwards. But he could not see where the joke came in; perhaps, because he is of English parentage.

The Mayor's tendency to form quick judgments was aptly illustrated when he returned from a visit to his father in England while he was Mayor-elect.

During his absence from Philadelphia, there had been some talk of selling or leasing the water works. Naturally, the newspapers were anxious to know what would be the new Mayor's policy if such a proposition should be forthcoming, and so, as soon as he had stepped off the steamer, he was asked if he would agree to a lease or sale.

"Never," was his reply.

"But," some one urged, "what if circumstances——"

"I don't care what the circumstances may be; I'll never stand for sale or lease of the water works."

No proposition looking toward a sale or lease of the works has been seriously made since the Mayor made this statement.

John Weaver can take the hardest sort of blows without displaying the slightest tremor of his big chin or showing outward concern of any sort. When Councils recently passed nine bills over his veto, and thereby slapped him harder than Councils ever slapped any previous Mayor, no one could detect any visible change in his demeanor. He was equally cool when the Finance Committee of Councils neglected to inform him that the gas lease was before them and ignored his letter asking for information, leaving him to learn the terms of the lease through the newspapers. And when all the ministers of the city were praying for him, and delegations of them were besieging him, he was the same cool, unperturbed John Weaver that he is when leading his class of boys in the Tioga Baptist church Sunday-school. Whatever his enemies may say of him, they cannot but admire the perfect control that the man has over his outward actions, even when a crisis is hanging over his head.

Whenever he wants anything done John Weaver does it himself. On the whole he looks with suspicion upon the advice proffered him on all sides. He has a habit of consulting himself, as the political leaders have found out many times since he became Mayor. Up to the time of the fight over the gas lease Leader Israel Durham, alone of all the Republican leaders, was able to produce any impression on the Mayor once he had made up his mind to do a thing; and Durham himself had to acknowledge many a defeat.

One of the man's peculiar traits is that of keeping callers waiting to see him an unconscionably long time. He will make an appointment to meet a delegation at 10 o'clock, say; it will be 1 o'clock before the delegation is ushered into his private office. Once he kept a young couple who wanted to be married by him waiting the better part of two days, finally pronouncing them husband and wife after a weary wait on the second day stretching from 10 to 3 o'clock.

During the time that he has been the Quaker City's executive head, he has not given up his law practice, and he makes no attempt to cover up the fact that his private affairs take up a large part of his time.

Before he was Mayor, his law office was down town on Walnut street, across the square from Independence hall. Now it is in a building facing on City hall, and many are the afternoons that the Mayor has spent in his law office consulting with his partner, Frederick S. Drake. He is frequently in court and appears in cases, and his law office stenographer does not hesitate to travel back and forth between the office of John Weaver, lawyer, and the office of John Weaver, Mayor.

When he has been approched about this matter, the Mayor's reply has always been that he does not intend to give up his practice simply because he is Mayor, that he could not afford to do so, and that he does not see anything wrong in continuing in the law so long as he does not neglect the interests of the city.

The Mayor is frank—extremely frank. Sometimes this frankness leads him to say things that he wishes he had not said. Frequently in public he will make certain statements, and then, turning to some one beside him, say, "I guess I should not have said that, but it would come out."

The Mayor is proud of the fact that he is of English birth. At a banquet of the Sons of St. George, in 1904, he said, with characteristic frankness:

"If I have done anything in office to the liking of the good people of Philadelphia, I attribute it to the English blood that is in my veins. I tell you, gentlemen, a man makes a better man if he has English blood in his veins."

Of course some of the Mayor's enemies made a great howdy-do over this sentiment, but little did the fuss disturb John Weaver.

"Honest All Through."

These enemies—or rather, the men who were John Weaver's enemies before he delivered the city from the gas crowd—have said many sharp and cutting things about him both as a man and an official. But one and all unite in declaring that both as a man and an official he is beyond the reach of money. "He's a bad Mayor, but he's honest," was a common expression in Philadelphia before the gas fight. Now the expression runs on the lips of these self-same reformers: "He's a good Mayor—the best we ever had—and he's honest all through."